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ABSTRACT

The contractual duties of the department chairman at Rhode Island Junior College (RIJC), as at most public community colleges, place him in three roles: administrator, spokesman for his department, and teacher. Because, as a teacher, he is also a member of the collective bargaining unit, a conflict of role assignments occurs whenever the chairman is the target of some accusatory proceeding. In such a situation, the department chairman has no established protector--he is caught in the middle. Recognition of this problem led the author to survey 19 chairmen at RIJC as to their role perceptions. Significantly, opinion concerning whether or not to remain members of the bargaining unit split almost equally. As a result of chairman questionnaire and interview responses, a review of the literature, and consultations with faculty, administrators, and others, the author recommends that the chairman retain membership in the collective bargaining unit, that each duty in the contract be specifically labeled as to the role it represents, and that the dilemma of who should provide due process be resolved by providing different support depending on the role under attack. Questionnaires and organizational charts are appended. (Author/DC)

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The Role of the Department Chairman in Governance at Rhode Island Junior College

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Rhode Island Junior College

A Practicum Presented to Nova University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

January 18, 1975

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Introduction

The present legally binding contract[1] between the Rhode Island Board of Regents and the Rhode Island Junior College Faculty Association lists the following as duties for the department chairman.

"The department chairman shall:

1. have responsibilty for the program of the department under the dean,
2. cooperate with department members in planning programs,
3. evaluate the instructional, administrative processes of the department and make recommendations to the dean,
4. evaluate periodically the department members and report the evaluation as required,
5. recommend appointments, reappointments, promotions and dismissals of department members,
6. insure that adequate supervision, advice and training are provided to new department members and others who might profit therefrom,
7. generally promote the welfare of the department and the college by every appropriate means,
8. and carry out such other duties as are set forth elsewhere by the College."

Duties (2) and (7) are generally in accord with the concept of the department chairman as a spokesman for the department. In such a role, he tries to obtain from the administration approval for the programs which his department desires, the necessary budgets, and also promote the vested interests of each faculty member of his department.

Duties (1), (3), (4), (5), (6), and (8) place him in a very different role - the concept of chairman as the first level of the administration-representing the broader interests of the College as opposed to the narrower interests of his department. Indeed, he is placed on the school's organizational chart as the lowest level of the administrative structure (See Appendices A, B, and C).

His role as an administrator is further complicated by the fact that he is considered a member of the collective bargaining unit and must pay dues (agency shop agreement) whether he desires voting membership or not.

Historically, the school administration has considered department chairmen the first line of administration in dealing with faculty. The role of department spokesman evolved gradually and in a limited way over a period of the first eight years of the college's life. Being a member of the bargaining unit has been a fact of life in these last two years which followed the first eight years of college life.

If a faculty member has a grievance against his chairman, he must grieve the administration to try to achieve a satisfactory resolution. Many department chairmen see themselves as rather "helpless pawns" in this process. An identity crisis seems to exist-is the chairman primarily an administrator or primarily a department spokesman? How can he possibly be both as the contract requires? How can he possibly be an administrator and a member of the bargaining unit simultaneously? Can he be a department spokesman and a member of the bargaining unit simultaneously?

Neither the school administration nor the officers of the faculty association planned this dilemma. However, they both recognize there are problems and wish to provide satisfactory solutions just as ardently as do the department chairmen.

J. Victor Baldridge [2] elaborates on the conflicting roles of the chairmen as administrators and as department spokesmen in the New York University system. Louis W. Bender of Florida State University (also a Nova University national lecturer) has also questioned the propriety of department chairmen who evaluate faculty also being members of the bargaining unit.

The problem seems to separate itself into three areas:

1. Is there a conflict between the roles of administrator and department spokesman?
2. Is there a conflict between the roles of administrator and faculty member of the collective bargaining unit?
3. Is there a conflict between the roles of department spokesman and faculty member of the collective bargaining unit?

Should any of the above problem areas be found to exist, it is necessary to pinpoint the specific nature of the conflict before it can be resolved.

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The role of the department chairman is beginning to be recognized as being a vital link in college governance. Scheuffer [3] makes the following points:

1. the department chairman in an educational institution is the point where good supervision, management, and administration must begin.
2. a lack of understanding of the chairman's role has led to a neglect of the position and a subsequent weakening of the management structure of the institution.
3. the various roles the chairman is expected to play must be clearly defined in such a way that roles do not conflict.

In a survey of two-year colleges in New York, Blomerley [4] found that in 78% of the departments, the chairman exerted the major influence in departmental decisions. In another 16% faculty and chairman influence was about equal, and in 6% the chairman exerted complete control. The influence of each could be further broken down by area as follows:

1. curriculum and text selection-faculty influence strong.
2. promotion and retention-primarily influenced by the chairman.
3. goals, student relations, and interdepartment relations-equal influence of faculty and chairman.

The greater the faculty influence in each college, the higher the faculty morale was in general.

Darkenwald[5] points out that chairmen are torn by decision making conflicts between professional and bureaucratic subsystems in typical colleges and universities. Lombardi[6] further analyzes the dual role (spokesman and administrator) that chairmen play and explores alternative models of departmental organization which attempt to reduce separatism within the college.

Smith [7] points out that much research has already been done to clarify the roles of the president and the dean, but very little has occurred concerning the department chairman. The department chairman wants and needs role clarification. In his survey of roles that chairman are often expected to play in Michigan community colleges, upper echelon administrators, faculty, and chairmen themselves cannot agree on what the chairmen is supposed to do and not to do.

Bachman [8] studied twelve liberal arts colleges concerning what caused faculty satisfaction with their chairmen. Clarity was found related to lack of conflict between faculty, chairmen, and other administrators as to what the chairman should do and should not do.

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Edwards[9] became a department chairman feeling that faculty should be more involved in decision making and left the chairmanship four years later feeling the opposite. He defines democratic pluralism as administrative willingness to turn over decision making to faculty and try to arrive at a consensus. Objections to democratic pluralism consist of the following:

1. The department tends to serve itself, not educational needs.
2. When administration needs to make a decision where consensus is not possible, it usually evades the issue and exacerbates the problem.
3. To offer something for everyone, high sounding generalities are made which are vague on critical points of application.

In this atmosphere, the chairman is often faced with the following uncertainties:

1. The administration wants "our man in the department" to act as a transmission belt to project its point of view. He is supposed to keep the peace if this point of view is not favorably received. Can he?
2. His department faculty expect him to get everything that they want from the administration. This can irritate the administration. Is this good?
3. His most important and difficult role is to evaluate faculty. What standards can he use? Must he rely only on student and faculty hearsay? Must he rely on complaints or the absence of complaints? What reasons are sufficient to award merit or to fire?

Edwards concludes by recommending that chairmen be considered a part of management and that administration and faculty bargain politically as to who has authority over what; the results of bargaining should be clearly spelled out in the contract. This would be difficult for many, but he feels that at least it would be honest compared to the present system.

It is hoped that the reader is now convinced that the lack of clarity of role for department chairmen is a major problem in education.

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Procedures

A questionnaire concerning the eight duties of the department chairmen as enumerated in the contract was submitted to all chairmen within the Arts and Sciences Division, the Nursing Division, and the Vocational-Technical Division. They responded as to whether they (1) agreed, (2) disagreed; (3) could function with or without the duty, or (4) had no opinion, on each of the eight duties. In addition, a ninth question asked how they felt about being in the teachers' bargaining unit. To receive frank responses to the questionnaire anonymity was provided (See Appendix D).

Interviews followed the responses to the questionnaire. Of particular interest were those advocating any of the following:

1. both the administrator and spokesman roles,
2. both the administrator and bargaining unit roles, and
3. both the spokesman and bargaining unit roles.

These people were asked how they resolve the apparent conflict of these positions in their own minds.

Recommendations for contract changes were made only after using the above data in conjunction with a thorough literature search and consultation with administrators and selected faculty at Rhode Island Junior College, officers of the RIJC Faculty Association, staff and legal counsel of the Rhode Island Education Association (an affilate of NEA), Nova national lecturer Louis W. Bender, and and several department chairmen and administrators of nearby community colleges.

It was assumed that the eight contracturally enumerated duties plus membership in the collective bargaining unit would embrace all the conflicts in roles that department chairmen presently feel. If other conflicts were perceived, the chairmen could state them at the end of the questionnaire or in the follow-up interview.

The questionnaire was not circulated to non-chairman faculty or to upper echelon administrators. With the wealth of administrator and faculty opinion on what a chairman should be and a dearth of department chairman opinion on the same subject, it was felt that the chairman view should be heard predominently in this paper.

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Results

The final tabulations on the nine-item questionnaire are shown in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 which comprise the next four pages. All three divisions' cumulative totals, the Vocational-Technical Division, the Nursing Division, and the Arts and Sciences Division (in that order) are tabulated separately.

All four chairmen in the Vocational-Technical Division and all four in the Nursing Division (including one assistant chairman) responded. Eleven of the twelve chairmen in Arts and Sciences responded. Thus 19 of 20 possible returns were received.

Respondents were virtually unanimous in supporting six of the contracted duties.[10] These are:

1. "have responsibility for the program of the department under the dean,
2. cooperate with department members in planning programs,
3. evaluate the instructional, administrative processes of the department and make recommendations to the dean,
4. evaluate periodically the department members and report the evaluation as required,
5. recommend appointments, reappointments, promotions, and dismissals of department members, and
6. generally promote the welfare of the department and the college by every appropriate means.

On evaluation, one chairman stated "I am not convinced that an accurate method of evaluating teaching effectiveness has been developed yet. The only way to measure effectiveness is to be able to measure both input and output accurately, and this has not been accomplished to my satisfaction yet..... I believe in peer evaluation as the most productive method available to date, although I realize that it has its weaknesses also." When he mentions the necessity to measure input and output, he is in agreement with Cohen.[11]

Another remarked that evaluation and recommendation "are of little value because promotions are automatic based on longevity-no merit involved." On a more positive note, another said that while evaluation takes many days in a large department, "the cooperation of the department members makes it easier and a rewarding experience."

TABLE 1

All Three Divisions

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Questionnaire

For each of the following items, please use the following letter code in filling in the blank space which precedes each item:

A - agree....I feel this is a proper role for chairmen.
B - disagree..I don't see this as a proper role for chairmen.
C - don't care much one way or the other...I can function with or without this role.
D - no opinion.

"The Department Chairman shall:

A	B	C	D	
19				1. have responsibility for the program of the department under the dean,
19				2. cooperate with department members in planning programs,
19				3. evaluate the instructional, administrative, processes of the department and make recommendations to the dean,
18		1		4. evaluate periodically the members and report the evaluation as required,
19				5. recommend appointments, reappointments, promotions and dismissals of department members,
16	2	1		6. insure that adequate supervision, advice and training are provided to new department members, and others who might profit therefrom,
19				7. generally promote the welfare of the department and the College by every appropriate means,
11	5	2	1	8. carry out such other duties as are set forth elsewhere by the College."
7	8	3	1	9. You are now a member of the faculty bargaining unit and you are represented by the RIJC Faculty Association. Given your choice, would you like to remain a member of this bargaining unit?

TABLE 2

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Vocational-Technical Division

Questionnaire

For each of the following items, please use the following letter code in filling in the blank space which precedes each item:

A - agree..I feel this is a proper role for chairmen.
B - disagree..I don't see this as a proper role for chairmen.
C - don't care much one way or the other..I can function with or without this role.
D - no opinion.

"The Department Chairman shall:

A	B	C	D	
4				1. have responsibility for the program of the department under the dean,
4				2. cooperate with department members in planning programs,
4				3. evaluate the instructional, administrative, processes of the department and make recommendations to the dean,
3		1		4. evaluate periodically the department members and report the evaluation as required,
4				5. recommend appointments, reappointments, promotions dismissals of department members,
3	1			6. insure that adequate supervision, advice and training are provided to new department members, and others who might profit therefrom,
4				7. generally promote the welfare of the department and the College by every appropriate means,
2	2			8. carry out such other duties as are set forth elsewhere by the College."
2		2		9. You are now a member of the faculty bargaining unit and you are represented by the RIJC Faculty Association. Given your choice, would you like to remain a member of this bargaining unit?

TABLE 3

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Nursing Division

Questionnaire

For each of the following items, please use the following letter code in filling in the blank space which precedes each item:

A - agree...I feel this is a proper role for chairmen.
B - disagree..I don't see this as a proper role for chairmen.
C - don't care much one way or the other..I can function with or without this role.
D - no opinion.

"The Department Chairman shall:

A	B	C	D	
4				1. have responsibility for the program of the department under the dean,
4				2. cooperate with department members in planning programs,
4				3. evaluate the instructional, administrative, processes of the department and make recommendations to the dean,
4				4. evaluate periodically the department members and report the evaluation as required,
4				5. recommend appointments, reappointments, promotions and dismissals of department members,
4				6. insure that adequate supervision, advice and training are provided to new department members, and others who might profit therefrom,
4				7. generally promote the welfare of the department and the College by every appropriate means,
3		1		8. carry out such other duties as are set forth elsewhere by the College."
2	2			9. You are now a member of the faculty bargaining unit and you are represented by the RIJC Faculty Association. Given your choice, would you like to remain a member of this bargaining unit?

TABLE 4

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Arts and Sciences Division

Questionnaire

For each of the following items, please use the following letter code in filling in the blank space which precedes each item:

A - agree..I feel this is a proper role for chairmen.
B - disagree..I don't see this as a proper role for chairmen.
C - don't care much one way or the other..I can function with or without this role.
D - no opinion.

"The Department Chairman shall:

A	B	C	D	
11				1. have responsibility for the program of the department under the dean,
11				2. cooperate with department members in planning programs,
11				3. evaluate the instructional, administrative, processes of the department and make recommendations to the dean,
11				4. evaluate periodically the department members and report the evaluation as required,
11				5. recommend appointments, reappointments, promotions and dismissals of department members,
9	1	1		6. insure that adequate supervision, advice and training are provided to new department members, and others who might profit therefrom,
11				7. generally promote the welfare of the department and the College by every appropriate means,
6	3	1	1	8. carry out such other duties as are set forth elsewhere by the College."
3	6	1	1	9. You are now a member of the faculty bargaining unit and you are represented by the RIJC Faculty Association. Given your choice, would you like to remain a member of this bargaining unit?

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Only two respondents disagreed with the duty of chairmen to "insure that adequate supervision, advice, and training are provided to new department members." While one would delegate that responsibility to a senior department member, another dismissed such a role by saying "College faculty members who need supervision and training are not qualified to be college educators."

Five people objected to "carrying out such other duties as are set forth elsewhere by the college" as being either too general, too vague, or too open-ended.

Opinion concerning whether or not to be members of bargaining unit split nearly equal-seven for and eight against-so this item will receive the most attention. It is obviously the most significant problem.

Those supporting membership used the following arguments:

* "As long as department chairmen have a teaching role, they are members of the faculty."
* "I don't feel I could adequately represent my department if I felt unhappy being in the faculty bargaining unit."

Those opposing membership in the bargaining unit were more vocal. A sample of the comments follow:

* "We are neither fish nor fowl as it is set up now; we have no real authority in either bracket."
* "Realistically a department chairman is part of management. Under the present structure he is in an awkward position."
* "Department chairmen should be identified with administration if they are to carry out the responsibilities listed above."
* "The department chairman is part of the administration and as such should not be a member of the faculty bargaining unit."
* "As far as I am concerned, the department chairman has not been represented by either the Association or the Administration-we are in a group that falls somewhere in between."
* "Evidently the department chairmen have not been well represented by the bargaining unit."

Louis W. Bender (Nova University national lecturer) believes chairmen cannot successfully be both evaluators of faculty and be the object of a grievance filed by a faculty member when both are members of the same bargaining unit.

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At this time, both upper echelon administrators at RIJC and officers of the RIJC Faculty Association believe they have satisfactorily achieved a good set of duties for chairmen through the bargaining process. They admit, however, that chairman input on this matter has not been vigorously sought. Also, doubt has been expressed as to who should represent the chairman in a grievance filed by a faculty member directed against the chairman.

Nearby schools also have this problem, although some have resolved it in one of the following ways:

1. The chairman is an administrator and is not a member of the bargaining unit.
2. The chairman is a department spokesman and a member of the bargaining unit. Department policy is decided by department members by majority vote. The chairman administers that policy. Evaluation of faculty is done by an assistant dean or some other administrator.

The executive secretary and the legal counsel of the Rhode Island Education Association (RIEA) have both expressed the desire that department chairmen remain members of the bargaining unit as long as they continue to have teaching duties. Otherwise, the chairmen would not have access to due process in action taken against them relative to their teaching and related faculty assignments.

This RIEA point of view further holds that, if action is taken against a chairman because of his administrative function, he should be represented by the upper echelon administration or their legal counsel.

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Recommendations

Department chairmen presently have three separate roles to perform in carrying out their eight contractual duties. These roles are:

1. administrative,
2. representative of department (spokesman), and
3. teaching.[12]

It is unlikely that serious attention will be given by upper echelon administration or the bargaining unit to dropping any of these roles. It is also unlikely that the bargaining unit will cease to exist. How then can the conflict among these roles felt by chairmen be resolved?

The author recommends that the chairman remain a member of the bargaining unit (his teaching role keeps him a member of the faculty); however, adequate safeguards must be instituted so that he has complete protection of due process in any accusatory proceeding directed against him. Due process is assumed to be the right of any individual and it is further assumed that we must vigorously provide it.

How can such protection be provided when, on one hand, the chairman may have a grievance directed against him by a faculty member, and, on the other hand, he may be threatened with loss of chairmanship by the upper echelon administration? The contract also allows for his removal as chairman if a majority of the faculty in his department petition for such removal.[13]

The dilemma of who provides due process can be resolved by providing different support depending upon which chairmanship role is being attacked. This can be achieved as follows:

1. If the chairman is under attack because of an administrative decision, he should receive the backing of administration (or its legal counsel).
2. If the chairman is threatened by the upper echelon administration because of his strong advocacy of his department and its wishes, he should have the backing of the bargaining unit (or its legal counsel).
3. If the chairman is accused of any shortcoming with respect to his teaching function, he should have access to protection by the bargaining unit.
4. If the chairman is dismissed from the chairmanship by the President, his appeal (should he desire it) should have the support of the bargaining unit.
5. If the chairman has a petition directed against him by faculty within his department asking for his dismissal, his appeal (should he desire it) should receive the support of the administration.

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Removing the chairman from the bargaining unit has been rejected because, as a teacher, he can have action taken against him by administration. Dropping some of his administrative responsibilities has been rejected because the added expense to provide extra layer of administration is prohibitive. The added administrative layer might also generate enough paper work for faculty that it could detract from the educational process.

Finally, the idea of a separate bargaining unit for department chairmen is not found to be advisable for two reasons:

1. The administration would have to use extra time bargaining with two groups of faculty instead of just one. The final agreements would have to be consistent with each other in areas such as teaching duties and teacher rights.
2. Two bargaining units are an unnecessary duplication. The chairman can be completely protected by administration or faculty bargaining unit- the one selected depending upon which functional role is under attack.

In order to follow these recommendations, the administration and faculty bargaining units must agree quite clearly on what functions a chairman must perform and spell them out quite specifically in the contract. It must further be stated which functions are administrative, which are department spokesman, and which are teaching.

If this is done, all parties concerned will know when the chairman is to be backed by the administration and when he should be supported by the faculty bargaining unit.

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Footnotes

1. Agreement Between Rhode Island Board of Regents and Rhode Island Junior College Faculty Association (RIEA/NEA), 1974-75, page 16.

2. Baldridge, J. Victor, Power and Conflict in the University, New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.,1971, pages 85 to 96.

3. Scheufler, John H., A Middle Management Position in Post Secondary Education, presented at meeting of Colorado Association of Deans, October 26, 1973, page 49.

4. Blomerley, Peter, The Junior College Department and Academic Governance, Community and Junior College Journal; 41;5; February, 1971, pages 38 to 40.

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6. Lombardi, John, Prospects for Middle Management, Change (Community Colleges Supplement); 4;8; October, 1972, pages 32a to 32d.

7. Smith,A.B. Department Chairmen: Neither Fish Nor Fowl Commumity and Junior College Journal; 42;6, March, 1972, pages 40 to 43.

8. Bachman, Jerald G, The Way in Which the Organization of College Departments Affects the Performance and Attitudes of College Faculty, The University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Report No. BR-5-8384: CRP-S-410, October, 1966, page 57.

9. Edwards, Scott, An Academic Chairman Looks at College Governance, Change; 4;7, September, 1972, pages 24 to 29.

10. Agreement, loc. cit.

11. Cohen, Arthur M., Dateline ' 79: Heretical Concepts for the Community College, Glencoe Press, Beverly Hills, California, 1969, page 92.

12. Agreement, op. cit., page 8.

13. Agreement, ibid., page 16.

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Wrigg, William, A Case For Survival, Clearing House; 47;1, September, 1972.

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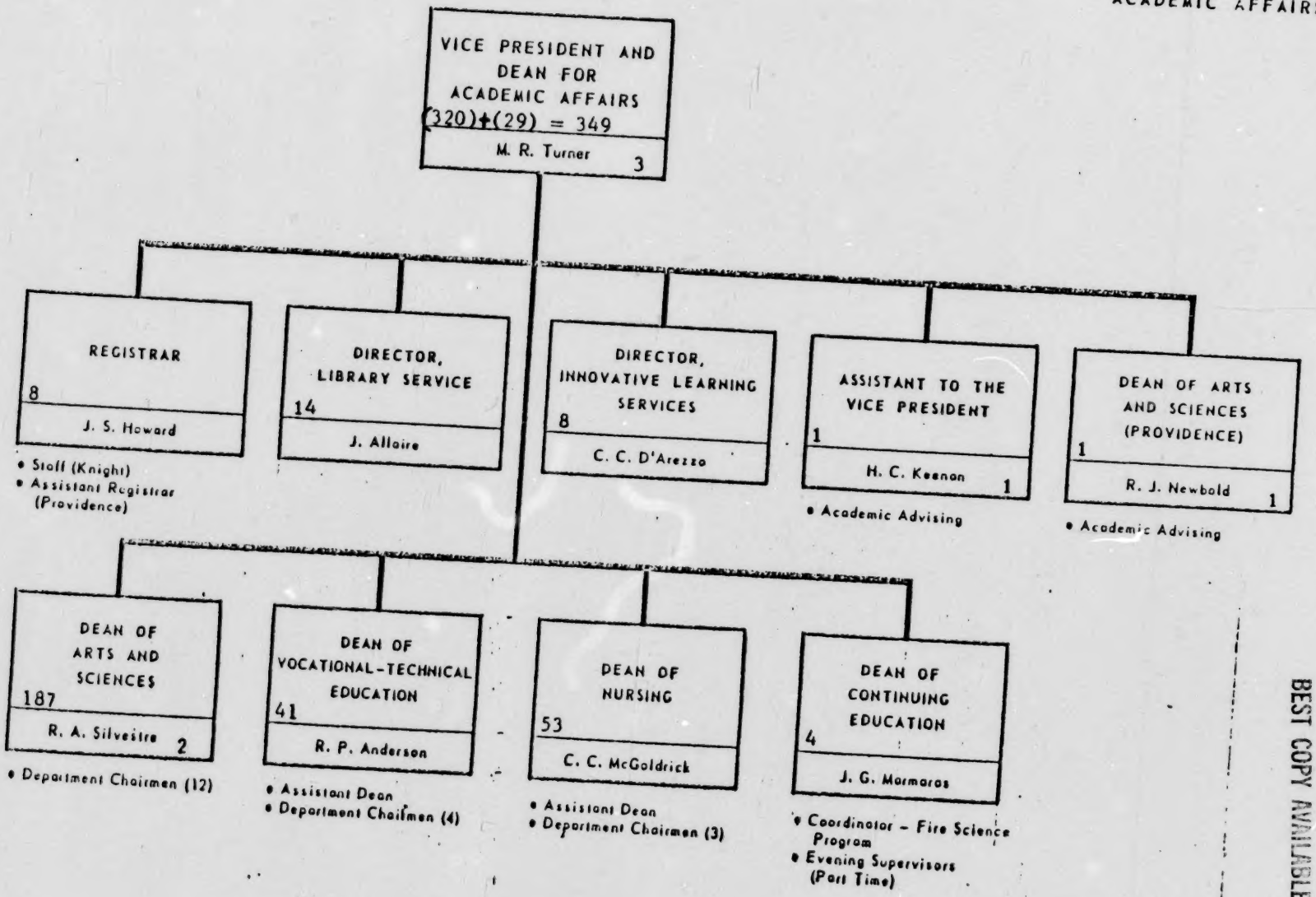
Appendix

RHODE ISLAND JUNIOR COLLEGE

PRESENT ORGANIZATION
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS



Appendix A

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Appendix B

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RHODE ISLAND JUNIOR COLLEGE

PRESENT ORGANIZATION
DIVISION OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

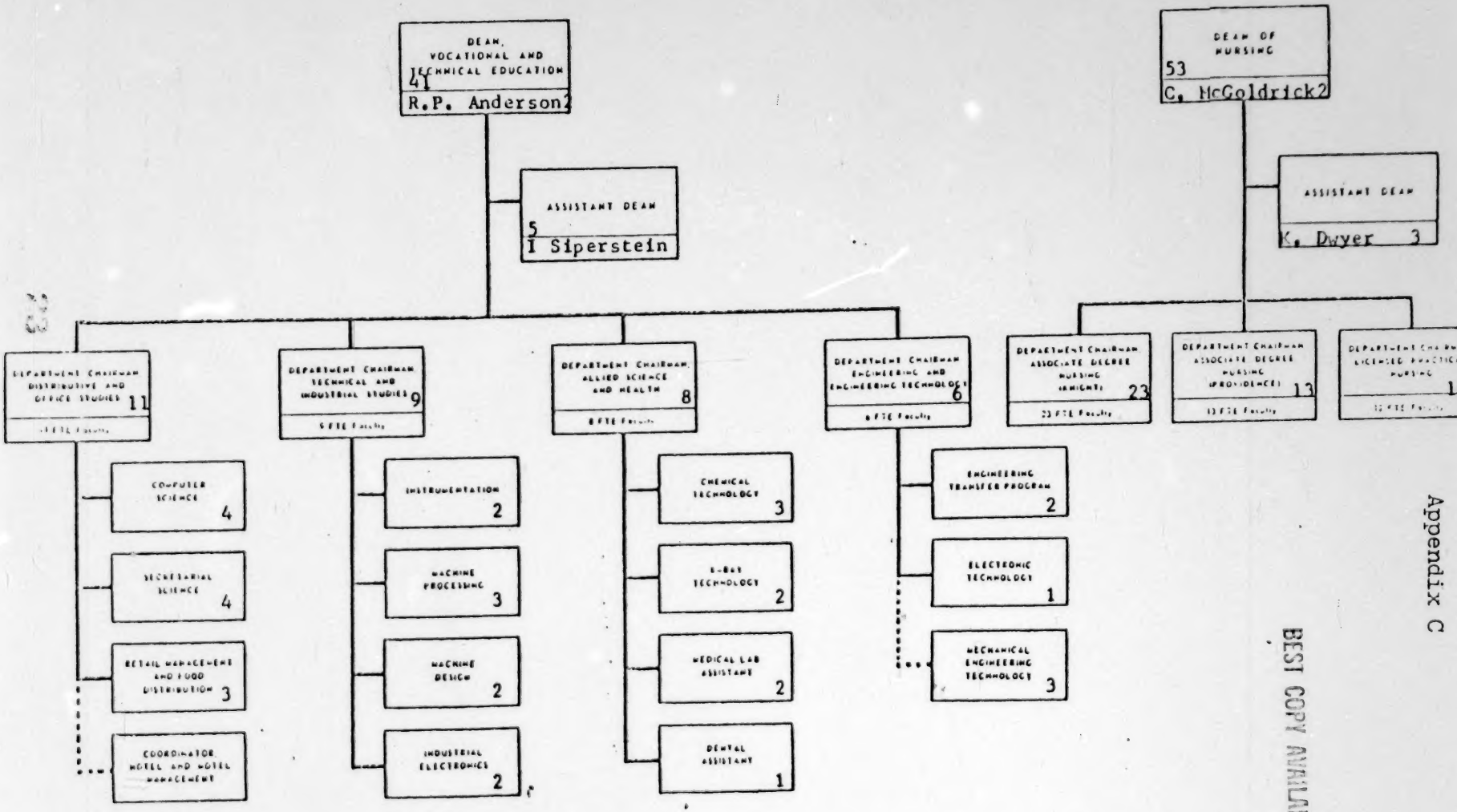
DEAN OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

12 DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN:

DEPARTMENT	FTE FACULTY
Art	10
Biology	17
Business	12
Chemistry	5
Educational And Social Services	6
English	38
Foreign Languages	11
Mathematics	18
Music	6
Physics	6
Psychology And Counseling	
Psychology	14
Counseling	8
Social Sciences	22
	185

RHODE ISLAND JUNIOR COLLEGE

PRESENT ORGANIZATION
DIVISIONS OF VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND NURSING



Appendix C

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Please Help !!!

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Dear Department Chairmen:

I am presently participating in a course in college governance. One of the course requirements is to do a research paper involving people who are presently professionally employed in some phase of college governance.

My chosen topic is The Role of the Department Chairman in Governance at Rhode Island Junior College. Your help in gathering the research data necessary to complete this paper has been approved by your divisional dean. Your answers will be considered confidential and only the statistical totals will be used in formulating my report.

As I see it, you have been mandated three different types of roles that you are expected to perform:

1. first level of college administration,
2. representative (spokesman) for department in any petition to administration,
3. membership in the faculty and representation by the RIJC Faculty Association.

The purpose of this study is to see if you are comfortable with all three roles, and, if not, where you see conflict, what roles would you like to see dropped or modified?

To keep your answers to this questionnaire anonymous, please do not sign it. Place it in an interoffice envelope and send it to Dwight Decker, Physics Dept, Warwick campus. If you place your name on a separate sheet of paper in the envelope, I'll know you have answered it and I won't bug you about it. But at the same time, your answers will remain anonymous.

Since this will be an action oriented research paper, some constructive change will probably take place with your thoughts having a vital input. Consider your answers carefully; I hope the changes that result will be helpful to your mission.

My heartfelt thanks for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Dwight F. Decker

Dwight Decker

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
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